

Let the Peace of Christ Rule in Your Hearts **Colossians 3: 1-4, 12-17**

A Wardrobe Problem

Men and women are different and men often do not understand women. One thing that I still don't understand is a wardrobe problem that many women seem to have. If you are a woman, you may have experienced the feeling that you have a wardrobe full of clothes but nothing to wear. Juhee's wardrobe seems to have the same problem. To me, Juhee's closet seems to be full of clothes but Juhee often tells me that she has nothing to wear. Occasionally, Juhee wants to donate her unwanted clothes and empty out her wardrobe. As time passes, the half-emptied wardrobe is gradually filled with new clothes but still... there is nothing to wear. It's a deep mystery that I have not figured out. If you have found the solution to this wardrobe problem, please educate your pastor so I can fix, not Juhee, but her wardrobe. I know that a husband cannot fix a wife so help me to fix her closet.

A wardrobe problem can be applied to our spiritual life too. In today's scripture, apostle Paul used the metaphor of clothing and exhorted Christians in the Colossian churches to clothe themselves with certain virtues. In the Message Bible, verse 12 is translated like this. [ppt] "So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline... And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment." (3:12-14) Paul described many virtues as clothing we should wear and urged Christians to dress themselves in the wardrobe God picked out for them.

While we often choose our clothes in terms of our personal tastes and fashion trends of our time, people were not completely free to choose their clothes in the ancient Roman society since what they wore directly represented their social status. For example, [ppt] the Toga was a distinctive garment of ancient Rome that non-citizens and freed slaves were not allowed to wear. Only Roman citizens could wear a Toga and it represented their protection under civil and divine law of the Roman empire. Also, the types of Toga people wore represented their social ranks. Some colors like purple were reserved for the political elite and nobles only. So citizens must wear the Toga appropriate to their social rank. Thus, what people wore directly related to who they were in ancient Roman society. Christians in Colossia were familiar with this cultural code, so Paul used the metaphor of clothes to urge them to dress themselves with appropriate Christian virtues so people would know who they were. You are what you wear!

A Spiritual Wardrobe Problem

What should we wear as Christians? Paul said, (vs.12) "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." In addition to these, Paul said, "And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it." (vs. 12-14) Compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love... are there any clothes you want to put on yourselves? Our spiritual closet is full but we often feel that there is nothing to wear. While God picks out these wonderful garments for us, and fills our spiritual wardrobes, we may hesitate to wear them because they do not seem fancy, attractive, or popular from our current cultural perspective.

When you think of the United States, what first comes to your mind? The land of freedom and opportunity. Freedom has been a core value of this nation. There is so much freedom. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to bear arms and even free-refills for

your diet coke at Berger King. It seems that Americans value freedom as one of their most important rights. Everyone including Christians seems to feel that freedom is a basic and all-purpose garment for them, and we want to wear this wonderful garment called freedom every day and everywhere. However, I also notice that whenever different opinions clash, people tend to invoke their right of freedom.

We are living in a very divisive time and in the middle of an intense culture war. Sadly, everything has become part of this culture war. From the Black Lives Matter movement to wearing a mask... from the issue of global warming to going back to school in the fall, people have different points of views. Having a different view is not a problem. That's natural. Diversity is a blessing. However, the toxic culture of division makes us less tolerant of those who hold different views and we become more aggressive and mean to each other.

Medical experts urge people to wear masks but some people do not want to. They argue that mandatory wearing of a mask violates their freedom to breathe. They say things like, "This is America where we should be free to choose for ourselves." No one has absolute freedom, so invoking freedom does not solve the issue but often intensifies the conflict.

We, Christians, need to remember that freedom is not our basic garment to wear, though people in our society wear it that way.

Clothed in New Life in Christ

We are called to wear kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love every day like a shirt. Instead of following the popular values of society, we are called to clothe ourselves with new life that embodies the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love... they are personal virtues but they also represent how we relate to other human beings. So, when we think of any particular issues like wearing a mask, we should not start with our right of freedom, but from love. Remember you are what you wear and freedom is not our basic-garment. To be kind to our neighbors, we sometimes need to give up our freedom. In fact, freedom doesn't mean doing whatever you want but having freedom to do what is right.

Additionally, a disagreement on certain issues doesn't mean hate. Unfortunately now a days, many Christians are intoxicated with the politics of hate. After the death of George Floyd, protests against racism and racial injustice erupted and spread across the country. "Black Live Matter" is a common slogan. Haven UMC, where Juhee serves as pastor, wants to show solidarity with African American brothers and sisters and decided to put "BLM" on their church sign. A few weeks ago, Juhee received an email from a person in East Providence. He introduced himself as a devout Catholic and said, the "BLM" church sign does not cohere with Christian teaching and it's even racist. He said, "why is it that 'ONLY' black lives matter? All lives matter" and he demanded removal of the BLM sign.

How do you read "BLM?" Do you read it as, "ONLY" black lives matter? I read it as "Black lives matter too!" For far too long, black lives have been ignored, mistreated, and unjustly killed. As a person of color, I can tell you that racism is still rampant in our society. "BLM" is not a claim that ONLY black lives matter but it is more like a desperate plea for "I am here. I am also a human being just like anyone else and my life matter too!" So Juhee respectfully wrote her response to him regarding Haven's disagreement with his interpretation of BLM and invited him to further conversation. Do you know what happened next? He wrote an email full of anger and hate. He even dared to call Haven church a fake church and unjustly blamed Juhee. This incident stressed Juhee out for a week. I was saddened by the fact that even a

self-proclaimed devout Christian could so easily mistreat their brothers and sisters if they seemed to have different opinions on certain issues.

But what we wear is who we are. When we wear political identity as our primary garment, we become Republicans or Democrats first, but not Christians. When we wear spiritual garments like kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love in our daily lives, we can be fathers, mothers, carpenters, bus drivers, teachers, whoever we are without losing our identity as Christians. More importantly, we can be a peacemaker in this divisive society. As Paul said, love binds everything together in perfect harmony. (14) If we wear love as our basic garment, instead of freedom, our society will be much more peaceful.

What are you wearing as your all-purpose garments? Let's wear the wonderful spiritual garments God has picked out for us!

Practice and practice

Clothed in Christ and wearing these spiritual garments brings life and joy. But this renewed life in Christ also requires an act of will. In fact, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love... all these spiritual garments essentially relate to our characters and forming our personal characters requires discipline and practice.

As you know, God didn't give me musical talent so God gave me a musician wife. Juhee is a good violinist. Right? Do you know how one becomes an excellent violinist? Only by practicing the violin. I have carried Juhee's violin for more than a decade but that hasn't made me a good violinist. Even if someone is gifted in playing violin, without practicing, no one can be an excellent violinist.

Like practicing music, our characters and virtues are shaped only by practicing them. How can you be a kind person? We can be kind people only by practicing acts of kindness. How can we be compassionate people? Only by practicing embracing the pain of others as our own. Simply thinking good things does not automatically make us good people. When doing good works over time become routine patterns of life, we call those people good people. They are clothing themselves with goodness. Just as we don't walk out of our homes without clothes, we are called never to leave home without putting on our love for each other, our love for our neighbor, without wrapping ourselves in the new life that embodies the life and ministry of Christ.

The church is a place in which we are learning this new way of life and where we practice clothing ourselves with these virtues, especially with love.

Perfect love casts out all fear, including fear of uncertainty and changing. When we clothe ourselves with kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love... when we embody those qualities, our church will live in harmony. Love binds us as a family. Love makes us live in harmony without fear. As we clothe ourselves in perfect love, we become one body in Christ that is driven by the peace of Christ, not by fear.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us clothe ourselves with the wardrobe God picked out for us: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, patience and most of all, love. Don't let fear and hate rule us, but only Christ govern our hearts. Amen.